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## Me Versus the Machine

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## Me Versus the Machine

*Sam Foreman*

Feature: Submission from a graduate of the class of 1994.

### • **It's the Principle, Darn It!**

It all started in October, if I remember correctly. You see, it's been going on for so long that it seems natural. Okay, so it's a late October evening on a college campus. I'm sitting in the living room in my dorm with a few friends of mine, and we're watching the Late Show with David Letterman. Dave's launching into his top ten list for that night.

"Right here in my right hand I have tonight's top ten list," starts Dave. "From the home office in Sioux City, Iowa, it's the top ten numbers from one to ten. Number ten. . ."

WHAM!

I hear a loud banging sound from near the entrance of the dorm.

"Gosh darn it!" someone yelled. Another WHAM follows.

My friends and I are distracted and look at each other, confused by the loud banging, which happens to be rather uncommon for that time of night, I might add. I decide to be brave and peek into the hallway.

I see my good friend Elsa standing in front of the dorm's Pepsi machine (It seems to be regulation on campus for each dorm to have one.) Basked in the warm blue and red light from the machine, she was fiddling with the little coin-insert thingy.

"What's up, Miss Elsa?" I asked her as I walked over to the Pepsi machine.

"This !@#\*\$? thing just ate two of my quarters," she

replied, kicking the machine again. WHAM!

"You know, Josh said he had the same problem last week. Maybe you should tell Jeff."

"Yeah, well," she said with a sigh, "I'll go tell him tomorrow." She began to walk back toward her first floor room. "See ya later, Sammy."

"G'night."

After that I went back into the living room to watch the end of Letterman. Little did I know what awaited me only a few of hours away.

Later that night, I looked up from my copy of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and checked the clock. Only 1:15 A.M. For a college student, that means the night is young. I was thirsty, so I strolled over to my little refrigerator to see what was what. Upon opening the door, however, I groaned like Old Mother Hubbard's dog – my cupboard was bare. What would I do? I can't concentrate when I'm thirsty. The college center and the convenience store inside were closed at that time of night. My only choice was the machine upstairs. So I grabbed three quarters out of my desk drawer and climbed upstairs.

The whole building was silent as I approached the Pepsi machine. It was disturbingly quiet. I put in the first quarter. It rattled about a bit, and then CLINK! It hit bottom. I put in the second one. It rattled again, and then CLINK! So I put the third one in. (Seventy five cents for a can of Pepsi! Can you believe it! I'm telling you, buy your soda at a grocery store! On campus, they'll rob you blind for for a little caffeine!) It rattled about a bit, and then. . . . nothing. My half-closed eyes opened very wide.

"What the !@#\$ . . .!" I muttered as I stared at the Pepsi machine. I gave it a little push.

Nothing.

I gave it a harder push.

Nothing.

“!@#\*\$?! piece of . . .”

WHAM!

I found myself repeating what I had witnessed earlier. The bloody machine ate my quarter! I had two in there legitimately already, so I ran down to grab some more change.

I put in another quarter. It rattled around a bit, and then. . . . nothing.

“DARN!”

I spent the next couple of minutes putting in every nickel, dime and quarter I had in hand. It ate them all. I stood there cursing it for a while, and then I realized something.

The coin return lever! I had been so intent on getting a Pepsi, I had forgotten the most obvious remedy to my problem. I stopped glaring and smiled a shameful smile as I pushed down on the lever.

Nothing happened.

“What the. . .”

WHAM! WHAM! WHAM!

Jeff, the Housefellow, wandered out into the hall.

“Sam, what’s going on?” he asked groggily.

“This thing ate my money! It did the same thing to Elsa earlier. Darn thing. . . !” I said as I kicked it again.

WHAM!

“Yeah, I’ll have physical plant come tomorrow and fix it. For now, just go to your room and, I dunno, ask your neighbors for a drink. I’ll see ya.” He wandered off towards his room.

The Pepsi machine had won this round. But before I retired to my room, grumpy and thirsty, I got in the last lick.

WHAM!

The next day, I went grocery shopping with a friend

and bought a mess of Coke. Never again would I have to bother with that machine, I thought. On my way in from the car, I passed the machine and noticed a piece of tape over the coin slot. I smiled. HA! The war was over as quickly as it had begun. And I had won. Sure, I was out a good couple of dollars in change, but it was the principle.

Well, it turned out that I was only partially right. That machine never ate another cent of mine. But the other things it did after it was "fixed" made me reminisce fondly about the good ol' change-eating days.

### • **The Dime Conspiracy**

About two weeks later, my grocery store supply of Coke ran dry. As luck would have it, it happened the night I was cramming for an astronomy exam. I needed caffeine quickly. So I grabbed some loose change from my desk (about \$1.35, I think), and ran to the Pepsi machine.

I put in a quarter. CLINK!

Looking in my hand, I saw that that was my last quarter. I did have, however, about twelve dimes in my hand, certainly enough to afford a seventy-five cent can of Mountain Dew, right?

I put in the first dime. CLINK!

Then the second. CLINK!

And the third. . . . PLINK! I looked down to find my dime in the coin return tray.

"Oh, come on," I muttered.

I put in another and another and another and another until all twelve were in. The first two had gone down into the machine. The rest were a series of PLINKs. With a sigh, I hit the coin release lever, and the three acceptable coins fell into the dish with a resounding and reverberating PLINK! I gathered them up and headed downstairs.

On my way, I met my friend Vanessa who, upon hearing about my dilemma, taught me the art of using

dimes on the Pepsi machine upstairs.

“You’ve got to be forceful with them,” she said, as she illustrated with her hands. “Just shove those little buggers on in there. And do it towards the right side of the coin slot. I don’t know why; it just works. Here, let me show you.” She took the change from my hand and lead me back upstairs to the machine.

After a few short seconds, I had my Mountain Dew. I was amazed.

“You’re incredible,” I gasped.

“Well, I know,” she said jokingly. “Really, it all comes down to patience. And *just* the right touch.”

Later that night, as I was about half sure of my knowledge of telescope magnifying powers, I began to feel parched again. Gathering another handful of dimes and my newfound knowledge, I went to the Pepsi machine.

Taking my first dime in hand, I pushed it into the coin slot, towards the right side, with the same force Vanessa had used before.

PLINK! It landed in the return dish.

So I tried every other coin I had on me. I pushed up a little bit, down a bit, to the right, to the left, straight down the center, forcefully, lightly, and with a little bit of spin. Nothing worked. Every dime I had fell through to the return dish. How did Vanessa do it? Maybe the machine prefers a female’s coins. Or maybe it’s me. Oh well, I never did figure out how to get it to take dimes when I wanted it to. I still get PLINKs to this day. Now my rule with the machine is quarters only.

### • **Soda Identity Crises**

Back in January, I woke up late one night and felt thirsty. So I gathered my quarters and headed to the Pepsi machine. I put in my money—CLINK! CLINK! CLINK! And then I pushed the Lipton Iced Tea button (I felt like

something lighter that night).

Out came a Pepsi.

“Oh, come on,” I groaned. I looked at the can for a while and decided my thirst was more important than my feelings, so I took it back downstairs and polished it off.

This wasn't an isolated incident, either. It happened twice more. When I pushed the Mountain Dew button, out came a Pepsi. One time, literally as soon as my third quarter made its CLINK a Pepsi popped out, no button pushing or anything. So now every time I attempt to get a Mountain Dew or Iced Tea, I say a silent, “Please, oh please, give me what I want,” before I put in my final quarter. It's happened with less and less frequency over the past few weeks, but I think that's just the Pepsi machine's way of toying with my mind. I know that soon it will return to giving me what it feels like I should drink.

So what does all this mean? What's the moral to our story? Well, first, when you get to college, buy everything you need to drink and eat in a grocery store. Vending machines can be expensive and antagonistic. But most importantly, remember that there ain't nothing like the real thing, baby. I'll bet a Coke machine would have been more hospitable.